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SUBJECT: CAMEROONQS MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS REVEAL WEAKNESSES

REF. YAOUNDE 1046

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 26, six re-run municipal council elections were peaceful and to some degree improved from other recent polls. However, turnout was lower than expected and there were numerous irregularities, highlighting major areas for improvement as Cameroon heads toward national polls in 2011. The ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) retained all councils except the fifth district of Douala (Douala 5), which it will share with the opposition. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 26, voters went to the polls in municipal council re-run elections in Matomb, Bana, Bafang, Pette, Mogode and Douala V. As reported in reftel, the elections were notable as it was the first time that the government had agreed to re-run elections following Supreme Court nullification of the results. The elections were peaceful, there were no complaints about indelible ink (as in past elections), the logistics seemed better planned, and opposition parties reported that they had better systems in place to block attempted cheating. Embosses were the only foreign observers, with one team sent to Douala 5 and one team to Bafang/Bana.

¶3. (U) While the ruling CPDM retained control of all six municipalities, the Municipal Council of Douala 5 (with about 250 thousand people) will go from being a CPDM bastion to being split between 45 CPDM, 14 Social Democratic Front (SDF)[ml] and 2 UPC (Union of the Peoples of Cameroon) Counselors. The SDF is contesting the Douala 5 results while former mayor Francoise Foning and aspirant Emmanuel Simo are struggling to be the party's choice for mayor.

Numerous Problems

¶4. (U) Voter Turnout: Voter turnout was mixed, but generally lower than expected. According to official numbers, Matomb, Pette and Modode had over 60 percent turnout, while the figure in Bafang was 49 percent and Bana 40 percent. In Douala 5, only 11 percent of the 154,346 thousand registered voters went to the polls. Several Douala 5 polling booths had zero voters.

¶5. (U) Procedural Problems: At several polling stations, especially in Douala 5 and Bafang, some voters objected to the acceptance of official application receipts in lieu of National Identification cards as forms of voter identification. As a result of this confusion, some people were not allowed to vote. In addition, vote counting was done in the near-dark, with many polling stations equipped with weak kerosene lamps or candles. Many voters seemed poorly informed about the election process and party workers lacked basic training about the law and procedures. There was some confusion about the voter register and complaints that voters could not find their names or saw duplicate names on the register.

¶6. (SBU) Corruption and Irregularities: Allegations of corruption were numerous. In Douala 5 and Matomb, the SDF and the UPC accused the CPDM of corrupting voters and the chairpersons of local polling commissions with money. In Douala 5V, allegations of fraud included

the falsification of reports, and ballot papers cast which outnumbered the number of registered voters. The regional president of the National Elections Observatory (ONEL) confirmed one specific case of apparent ballot stuffing. One CPDM representative in Douala 5 was summoned by the gendarmerie on corruption charges. SDF officials in Douala acknowledged to Pol/Econ Chief that some of their party officials had accepted money to stuff ballot boxes or to ignore irregularities. In Bafang, the SDF claimed that there was a ghost polling station, which was used by CPDM voters.

Comment

17. (SBU) The CPDM brought some heavy guns into the Douala 5 fight, including the Vice Prime Minister, but the struggle within the party for the mayorship reveals some discomfort with the controversial, high profile and allegedly corrupt Francoise Foning. The municipal council elections involved only six of 360 constituencies, were generally praised as better than previous polls, and had little direct national significance. However, the elections showed that there is still a lot to do to improve Cameroon's electoral system as it heads toward presidential elections in 2011 and municipal and parliamentary elections in 2012.

18. (SBU) All stakeholders are to blame for the problems seen on October 26. Despite recommendations that observers and ONEL made following the 2007 elections, the administration failed to clarify rules about identification papers. Political parties again displayed their poor knowledge of the law and internal organizational weaknesses. (In Bafang for instance, the SDF initially appointed monitors in polling stations where they were not registered, which could have resulted in their not being allowed to

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vote.) Because of weaknesses in the electoral law, ONEL was incapable of addressing many of the problems on election day. The low turnout likely reflected voter disillusionment with the electoral process, accentuated because this was a re-run election on a Sunday.

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